



STATE OF WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON WORKFIRST

Department of Social and Health Services • PO Box 45000 • Olympia, Washington 98504-5000 • (360) 902-8400
Employment Security Department • PO Box 49046 • Olympia, Washington 98504-9046 • (360) 902-9500
State Board for Community and Technical Colleges • PO Box 42495 • Olympia, Washington 98504-2495 • (360) 704-4400
Department of Community, Trade & Economic Development • PO Box 48300 • Olympia, Washington 98504-8300 • (360) 725-4000

May 24, 2006

TO: All WorkFirst Staff

FROM: Carole Holland, Senior WorkFirst Coordinator
Office of Financial Management

Deb Marley, Assistant Secretary, Economic Services Administration
Department of Social and Health Services

Paul Trause, Deputy Commissioner
Employment Security Department

Jim Crabbe, Director, Workforce Education
State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

Marijo Olson, Director, Community Services Division
Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development

SUBJECT: **SHARING CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION NEEDED TO HELP PARENTS SUCCEED**

As you know, we have been working together for many months to redesign our WorkFirst approach. We are beginning to implement the program changes that we believe will allow us to provide more comprehensive service to our clients and improve outcomes for WorkFirst parents and families.

We will be working together even more closely than in the past to work with parents to complete the Comprehensive Evaluation (CE). By sharing information through the CE process, we will be better able to engage parents and get them participating in the appropriate activities to prepare them for employment and self-sufficiency.

To make these changes a success, we must commit to share critical information needed by the partners to help parents succeed. We are currently working to develop the most appropriate method to share this information.

Until we have a permanent resolution on how to best share needed information, we are adding an additional mandatory question to the foundation section of the comprehensive evaluation. This new question will ask if the DSHS case manager documented any issues with family violence, chemical dependency, mental health or HIV/AIDS that would affect the parent's employability. This question will require a 'yes' or 'no' answer.

If the answer to this question is 'yes,' we are asking partner agency staff to call the DSHS case manager to get more information about the issue. The DSHS case manager will be expected to provide general information about the issues or special circumstances that the partner can use to make education, training and work-related recommendations. Specific policy and procedure guidance to implement this interim process will be provided to you shortly.

We carefully reviewed the laws and policies about confidentiality and information sharing, as well as the potential risks, before making this decision. We believe this is the kind of information WorkFirst partners must share, and legally can share, to effectively administer the WorkFirst program and deliver these critical services.

This change is in the best interest of WorkFirst parents. It will help us improve outcomes for families and help avoid the real risk — that of being placed under sanction or denied benefits because vital information that needed to be shared between partners was not available.

WorkFirst partnerships are supported by written data sharing agreements. These agreements mandate how we work together and set limits on what we can share and how confidential information must be safeguarded and protected from inappropriate or inadvertent disclosure. This change will be documented in our written agreements along with the requirement for an annual written acknowledgement from all staff about their responsibilities to use and protect confidential client information correctly.

We want to emphasize that all client information is confidential and, as public employees, we have a legal and ethical duty to use it only for work, share it only as allowed and protect it from misuse or accidental disclosure. These changes do not compromise this obligation or undermine our efforts, but only strengthen them.